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MACDONALD'S 'ASPECTS OF ISLAM'

Aspects of Islam. By DUNCAN BLACK MACDONALD, M.A., D.D.,
sometime Scholar and Fellow of the University of Glasgow,
Professor of Semitic Languages in Hartford Theological
Seminary. New York: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY, 1911.
pp. 375.

THE 'Aspects of Islam' consist of a series of ten lectures delivered by the author at the Hartford Theological Seminary under the auspices of the Lamson Fund. They address themselves primarily to the Christian missionary in Mohammedan countries, but they contain much that is of interest and value to the general reader. Professor Macdonald, who is the author of several books on Mohammedan theology and jurisprudence, has in the present volume made excellent use of his personal experiences gathered on a recent journey through the East. The author is a keen observer, with a remarkable fitness for theological intricacies, and he approaches the complicated problems of a strange religion with that sympathy and reverence which alone can unlock the hidden recesses of the human soul. It is gratifying to find that Professor Macdonald, free from that superficial rationalism which is fond of generalizing, fully appreciates the rôle of mysticism in Islam and even finds genuine religious values in the much abused practices of the Dervishes, although he very probably emphasizes too strongly the importance of the mystic element as contained in the Koran.

For the readers of this *Review*, the most interesting chapter of the book is no doubt Lecture VII, dealing with the attitude of Islam towards the Scriptures. Here Professor Macdonald mainly relies on Goldziher's well-known contributions, but, in contradistinction from his authority, he completely ignores the influence

of the Haggadah, Jewish as well as Christian, on the presentation of biblical subjects, both in the Koran and in subsequent Mohammedan literature. Making full allowance for the undoubted mendacity of the professional story-tellers and the converts from Judaism and Christianity, it may yet be safely asserted that the bulk of biblical legends recorded in Mohammedan literature can directly or indirectly be traced back to a haggadic source. Thus the story of Korah quoted by our author on p. 225 f. as a curiosity is based upon a well-known passage of the Midrash and is even alluded to in the Koran, as was already pointed out by Geiger (*Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen?*, second edition, p. 165). The same tendency to confound the biblical accounts with the haggadic elements clustering around them is no doubt responsible for the stories of later theologians, who certainly did not 'play fast and loose in this fashion' and are, at least in this respect, free from the demoralization with which our author is inclined to charge them (cp. p. 227). In this connexion it might perhaps be pointed out that if the verse, Joel 2. 13, is quoted by Ġazzālī (not Ġazzālī, as our author consistently writes) as contained in the Law of Moses (p. 228), it may in some circuitous way go back to the Mishnah Ta'anit 2. 1, where the same verse is quoted as being contained in the *Kabbalah* (ובקבלה הוא אומר). If the author had paid greater attention to this haggadic influence within Islam, he would have referred, in speaking of 'the most picturesque figure of all in the mythology of Islam, the saint al-Khaḍir' (pp. 206 ff.), to the corresponding elements in the post-biblical Elijah legend which to a large extent is the source of the Khaḍir legend (cp. *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, XIII, 96 ff.). In a similar manner the doctrines and legends of heterodox Christianity, though casually referred to, are not sufficiently drawn upon as sources of Islam. With reference to Ibn Ḥazm's famous polemics against the Scriptures (p. 239), the conjecture may safely be ventured that many of the objections pointed out by him were drawn from some older source and were probably the stock-in-trade with which the rationalists of those ages

operated against the Bible, or, more correctly, against the accepted biblical text (cp. my remarks in this *Review*, New Series, III, 291 f.). Similarly the same author in his attacks on rabbinical literature in all probability draws upon Karaitic sources, as was already suggested by Steinschneider. The supposed references to Mohammed in the Scriptures which form the backbone of Mohammedan polemics against Judaism and Christianity are dealt with in the same lecture and are faithfully though briefly summed up and characterized. It is interesting to note that the whole series of arguments quoted from Bīrūnī (p. 234 ff.) is found unabridged in Maimonides' *Iggeret Tēmān*. Cp. in part Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, p. 326 f.

Professor Macdonald is interested not only in the past of Islam but also in its present and future. His observations in this regard are exceedingly instructive and show insight and foresight. His characterization of the Young Turks as contrasted with the Egyptian Nationalists (pp. 254 f., 277) is illuminating. The former 'are thinking of Turkey and not of Islam'. The latter 'are thinking more of Islam than of Egypt'. But not all will agree; and the latest events seem to speak in their favour, to see with our author in this latter attribute a source of weakness. Professor Macdonald eloquently describes the disintegrating influence of the modern world upon the religion of Islam. He points out the tendency in certain sections of Islam to allow 'the wheels of progress to crush out all ideals' and to accept 'the lower facts of life' (p. 256). But, as our author rightly remarks, 'religions are never ended; they develop into new forms, absorb new life, and go on again' (p. 111), and so it may be hoped that in spite of all external and internal difficulties, Islam will survive the levelling influences of modern civilization and will carry on its message as one of the great religions of humanity.

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